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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000346

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/20/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [KCRM](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: NIGER DELTA AMNESTY FAILS TO IMPRESS

REF: A. ABUJA 01407

[1](#)B. ABUJA 01278

[1](#)C. LAGOS 0325

Classified By: CONSUL GENERAL DONNA BLAIR FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Nigerian Government (GON) amnesty program to end militancy in the Niger Delta is faltering. While as many as 400 militants have reportedly surrendered their weapons, high-profile leaders like Tom Polo have mostly kept away, deterred either by skepticism over GON intentions or, depending on the source, disdain for the money and terms tabled by GON intermediaries. Militants and GON officials continue to negotiate and spin the local media, but unless amnesty develops some genuine momentum and political credibility, prospects for an enduring peace process look dim. END SUMMARY.

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Militants Begin Surrendering Weapons  
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[1](#)2. (C) Since the GON amnesty plan officially began August 6, various leaders of militant groups have embraced the initiative, some of them surrendering weapons to the government. On August 8, President Yar'Adua welcomed militant leaders who expressed their readiness to cooperate with the GON. However, National Chairman of the Foundation for Ethnic Harmony in Nigeria (FEHN), Allen Onyema, told CG Lagos that since the amnesty began, no group has turned in any "sophisticated" arms, such as gunboats. According to Patrick Naagbantun, Director of the Niger Delta-based Center for Environment, Human Rights, and Development (CEHD), members of the Amnesty Implementation Committee financially induced non-militants to submit light weapons, including local guns and cutlasses, to give a semblance of compliance following the initial poor response. Chief Daniel Ebahor, President of the Niger Delta Peace Foundation, which interfaces with state governments and communities affected by violence, dismissed surrendered weapons paraded before the media as belonging to the police and criminal elements.

[1](#)3. (U) State-run Nigerian Television Authority has claimed that militants have surrendered over 800 weapons in Bayelsa State, including 14 gunboats, 60 machine guns, 13 rocket-propelled grenades, three anti-aircraft guns, 520 pump action guns, dozens of AK-47 automatic rifles, explosive, and bombs.

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Cease-fire - Can it last?  
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14. (C) On August 13, alleged militants bombed a major gas facility in Delta State, which Elizabeth Preye Joseph, head of a Bayelsa-based NGO, told CG Lagos was a sign that the militants remain opposed to amnesty. On August 18, a MEND spokesperson warned that the military Joint Task Force's alleged murder of an unarmed civilian threatened the 60-day cease-fire. Later, MEND threatened to resume attacks on oil installations in mid-September to prove that its members still retain a potent arsenal. Ebahor, of the Niger Delta Peace Foundation, told Poloff that MEND and splinter groups were using the current cease-fire to prepare for future attacks. (Note: MEND and other militant groups have traditionally used cease-fires to re-group and rebuild.)

15. (C) On August 17, Catholic Cardinal Olubunmi Okogie, from Delta State, expressed doubt to the Consul General that the amnesty, as conceived and implemented, would end violence in the Niger Delta. He alleged that powerful sycophants working with President Yar'Adua influenced the plan's hasty introduction without allowing sufficient time for consultation and dialogue. Security contacts from international companies told CG Lagos that the GON is merely "negotiating to negotiate," speculated the "surrendered" weapons actually came from GON armories, and expressed concern that MEND appeared to be fracturing even further with new splinter groups lining up to support ruling parties in the 2011 elections.

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COMMENT

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16. (C) The amnesty is not generating the momentum or political context and credibility it needs to prosper after its scheduled expiration date in early October. Deltans continue to dismiss reflexively any evidence that the amnesty might be working, while Abuja seems weary of the situation and to hope that money alone will end the problem. Meanwhile, oil theft -- involving the militants, government officials and security forces -- continues unabated, with no indication that production levels in the Delta are poised to rebound. Absent change on either oil thefts or production shut-ins, it's hard to imagine that amnesty in any guise has much of a future. END COMMENT.

17. (U) This cable has been coordinated with Embassy Abuja.  
BLAIR